**Thesis:** What would be the first thing you did if your biggest problem in life suddenly vanished? Through the cross, Jesus has caused our biggest problem in our lives, sin, to be wiped away. And the life that follows is rooted in a heart of gratitude that should cause us to praise God. Paul says in *Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

**Introduction:** Welcome to The Jesus Podcast, a year of stories showcasing the depth of Christ’s love and the glory of God’s truth. I’m \_\_\_\_ your host from Pray.com. Thanks for joining us for another story today. Make sure you’re following the podcast

**Context:** Our miracle today holds a lesson inside a lesson. In our story, we’ll meet ten lepers who find Jesus and his disciples, all with the hopes of being healed by the miraculous Rabbi. In Jesus’ time, leprosy was a symbol of both physical and spiritual death. As the body decayed from the disease, it was a reminder of how the soul decays from sin. Looking for physical salvation, the lepers come to the Healer asking for pity. Each one of them must then decide if they’re going to obey the words of Jesus in hopes of being healed. But of the ten, one will show us that Jesus wants to give us something greater than just physical healing. Though formerly united to others in a colony for their shared battle with leprosy, this leper would find a new community to be united in under a much greater purpose. Our story teaches us about responding to Jesus, growing in faith, and praising God with our whole hearts!

**Message:** The story of the healing of the ten lepers begins like many other miracles. Broken men and women coming to Jesus to be healed with his heavenly power. These ten lepers had spent the duration of the sickness banded together. While the communities they hailed from would have cast them out to keep the rest of the citizens safe from this deadly disease, they would find some semblance of connectivity with one another, even if for the worst possible reason.

Our story today reminds us of the importance of staying united as the people of God. If there was one thing Jesus promised we would face in the life for our faith, it was persecution and trials. Things that would try to pull God’s people apart. But as individuals who have the Spirit of God dwelling inside each one of us, there are key lessons to learn from the miracle of the ten lepers that show us how we can strive to keep the unity that the Spirit brings.

Our story today began with the disciples walking and talking with Jesus. As they travel, Jesus shares a warning with them on the importance of finding unity through empowering one another.

He says in *Luke 17:1 “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. 2 It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. 3 So watch yourselves.”*

In short, Jesus is telling us that there are going to be reasons why we stumble in this life. Problems that we face, mistakes that we make, and failures we have to get up from. But he exhorts us to never be the one to cause another person to stumble. Life gives us enough problems of our own, there’s going to be plenty of natural obstacles that cause us to stumble. And if we’re not mindful of our own conduct, we might be that stumbling block for another. Whether it’s an argumentative spirit, impulses for selfishness that cause us to think about ourselves more than others, or a lifestyle that detracts from the beauty and character of God, we could very well be a reason to cause disunity amongst God’s people. And Jesus condemns this heart that disrupts the work of the Spirit. Why? Because the nature of the Spirit is to draw us together as one. To embody the unity that exists in the Trinity. To represent Jesus’ love to a lost and dying world. While all sin draws us away from God, there is something significant about this sin of causing others to stumble. It prevents us from accomplishing the mission of Jesus to make disciples of all nations in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. We should be unified through empowering one another. Always looking for ways to lift one another up. Considering how to outdo one another in honor. How to stir each other up to love and good works. The Bible is full of commandments and encouragements to live as a unified community.

One of the ways we can apply this to our lives is by thinking about the way God has uniquely gifted us.

Paul says in *Romans 12:3 “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”*

God wants us to be a spiritual body, working together as different members to help one another with hearts of thanksgiving and praise. Paul says this is our *true and proper worship*.

But what if we do cause someone to stumble? Well Jesus addresses that next. He says in *Luke 17:3 “If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. 4 Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”*

Unfortunately, there are going to be times where the people of God cause one another to stumble. And the best thing we can do in these situations is offer forgiveness if we’re the one sinned against. This can be difficult when we’re hurt. But letting a bitter root in our hearts grow just creates more distance. We have to remember that the unity we experience as believers is only there because God forgave us first. And just as we have been forgiven, we should go on and forgive others.

Paul talks about spiritual maturity and unity in *Ephesians 4:29-32*, saying, *“29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

As Jesus shares with the disciples, the ten lepers appear before them. A mix of races and religions, all ten come with the same desperation for healing. Jesus tells the ten men to all go to the temple to show themselves to the priests. This was a risky command to obey as they hadn’t been healed yet. If they went to the temple without being cleansed, they would have only faced more pain and punishment. But they agree to go, and along the way, their healing comes. But we know from our story that only one comes back to thank and praise Jesus. It’s to this leper that Jesus says his faith is what made him well. This leper had learned what it meant to be unified to God’s people through faith. He could have gone on his way to the temple, entering back into community, finding friends or family that would have welcomed him back home. But instead, he goes back to Jesus to praise him. Because we all have been saved by grace through faith, we should be united in our gratitude for Jesus and our praise to him. There is something beautiful about an eclectic group of people being united under the same salvation. You’ve seen this in practice if you’ve ever gone to worship in a different church than your home church. Despite not knowing anyone, you can enter into God’s presence together and feel the Spirit moving in powerful ways!

It seems that the disciples were learning this lesson as well. The one leper that came back was not a Jew, but a Samaritan, someone who was looked down upon by the Jews. But in his heart of compassion, Jesus shows us how to seek unity through impartiality. Jesus didn’t just heal the Jewish lepers, he was willing to heal anyone and everyone and welcome them into the family of faith. As we continue in Jesus ministry, we should be seeking unity without partiality. We should never look at someone as unable to receive the same grace, mercy, and forgiveness from the Lord that we have. So go out and seek to keep the unity of the Spirit! Empower one another, forgive one another, serve one another with you, and see the beauty of how Jesus invites everyone to praise his name!